

Changed Method of Growing Asparagus

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

IF the weather is kind to us we may be able to catch up for lost time in the garden, but it will mean seizing every moment for seed sowing during the next week or two. April is also the best month for planting asparagus, and the modern view about asparagus is that it is far better to plant one-year-old crowns than two or three-year-old plants, because the one-year-olds establish themselves much more quickly and make a far finer plant in the long run. We have always been taught throughout the years that we should top dress heavily with manure, and feed asparagus beds lavishly. But recent experimental work has shown that asparagus is one of the few plants that respond to virtually no manurial treatment. True, by giving heavy dressings of sulphate of ammonia it is perhaps possible to increase the yield by about 5 per cent, but asparagus will grow on the poorest of soils and still give a worthwhile yield. I would, however, on any soil, prepare the bed thoroughly, and dig in manure or compost for the initial planting. If only to get the plants established and growing away lustily in their first year.

Nowadays, too, it is normal to plant asparagus on a level bed, and not as in the past in raised beds. My own experience on light, quick draining soil, is that asparagus appreciates water right throughout the summer, as indeed do all plants.

Pruning Time

Most of us are behindhand this year with pruning, but the roses should be pruned now without delay, and we should be pruning gooseberries, too, the birds having lost interest in the buds. If black spot has been troublesome in past years, it would be wise to spray the roses after pruning, and the ground beneath them, with captan, and repeat the spraying every two or three weeks throughout the summer.

Where black spot is really troublesome, this spraying with a captan spray will not eliminate it but it will keep it reasonably under control so that the plants are not unduly weakened by the disease. Black spot can be a very crippling, almost a killing, disease if allowed to go unchecked. Mulching the rose bed with peat or sawdust helps to keep the roses growing strongly, because the mulch keeps the moisture in the soil. If it is carefully collected, scraped off the bed at the end of the season when all the diseased foliage has fallen, and then burned, this will help to prevent the spores from being carried over to infect the bushes another year. One must make the proviso that if sawdust is used in the garden, some nitrogen must be applied with it—a handful of sulphate of ammonia to each square yard of a 2-inch mulch is plenty.

Lightweight Sprayers

This brings us to the question of spraying machines, and, as in many departments of the garden, plastic manufacturers have come to our aid with lightweight sprayers of all kinds. For really serious work, the plastic knapsack sprayer with a really smooth powerful pump, and an extendable lance enabling us to spray quite tall trees, must head the list. Less expensive, but equally effective, is the foot pump sprayer which pumps the spray fluid from a bucket, again through extendable lances, so that quite tall trees can be dealt with. For hand sprayers, plastic again is being used for the containers, and there is a great range on the market today. It is worthwhile spending a little time examining garden sprayers in a good garden shop that carries a large and representative range. But all sprayers have to have a pump of some kind, and this pump must contain a washer—almost invariably a leather one.

On many lawns curious white patches are appearing, caused by what is commonly known as the "snow fungus". This is a species of *Fusarium* which can, and does, spread under very cold conditions. If these white patches are not dealt with now, by applying a mercuric preparation, they can continue to increase and greatly weaken the whole lawn. If moss is present it will of course be killed by a mercuric lawn sand.

Gardeners often ask me whether insecticidal and fungicidal dusts are as efficient as the liquid sprays. Properly applied, and that is for preference when there is dew on the foliage, they do a very effective job and are much less messy than liquid sprays. We have seen a good many powder puffers in the past but only in the past year or two have the manufacturers really produced a machine which is a pleasure to use. Japanese in origin, this powder blower, which is worked by turning a handle at the side, does really cover quite a large tree or bush efficiently with the dust, and it is a most useful addition to the gardener's armoury of labour-saving aids.

Gardening.

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